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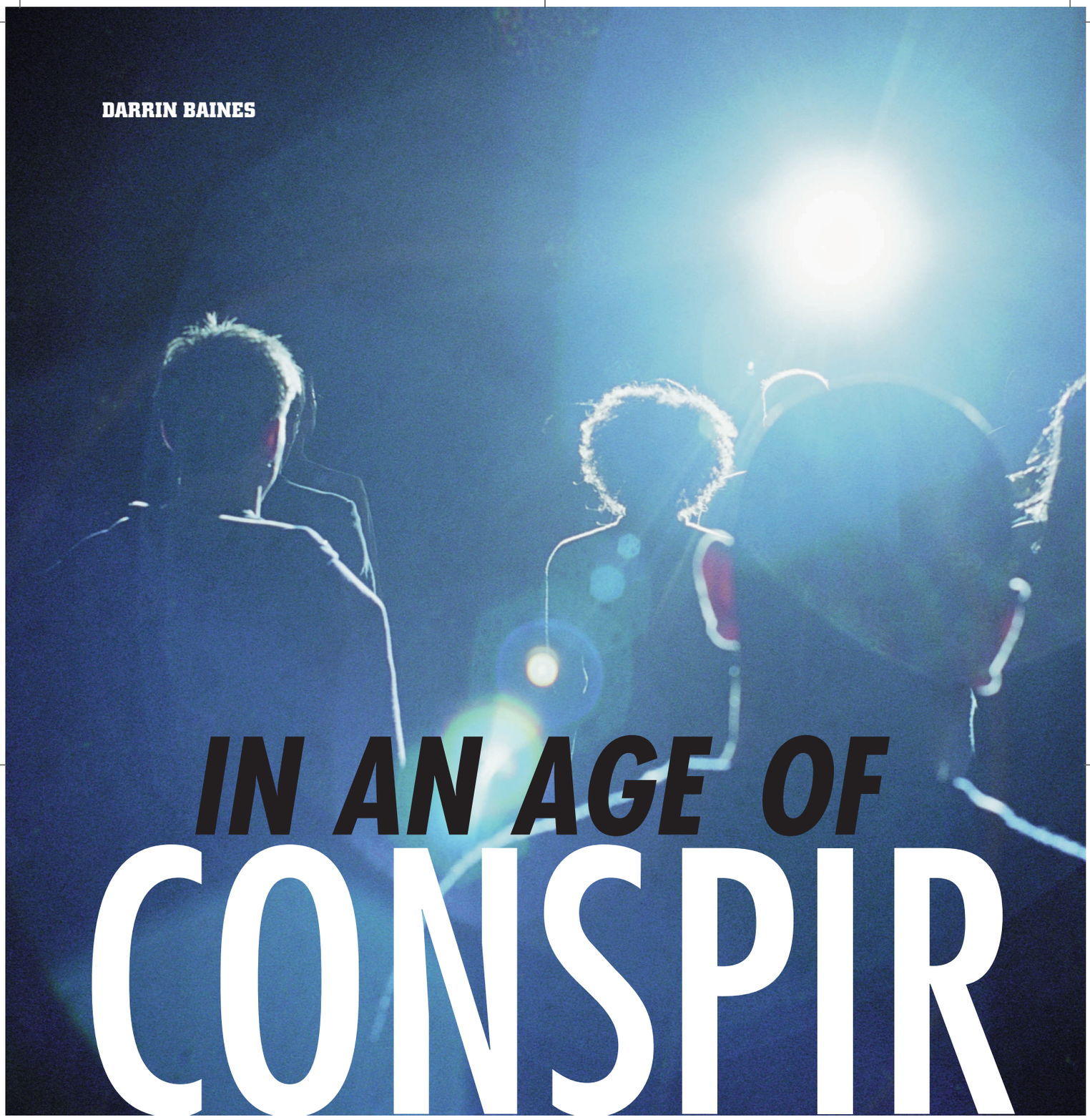


IN AN AGE OF CONSPIR

The pharma industry is built on secrets; make sure you have the hidden knowledge.

Beware. The true nature of the world is being hidden from you. Information vital to your success has been suppressed.

You are in the dark. You are not being fed what you should be fed. To save yourself, you must begin the search for the knowledge kept from you.

Look around you and watch everyone very closely. You will soon start to identify those who know, and those still in the inky darkness of ignorance.

Move closer to agents working on the inside, as these souls can shine a light on your darkened world.

However, before we start your journey, check to see if anyone has noticed you reading this article.

Your mission should you choose to accept it... if you are safe, stealthily remove yourself to the smallest room in your building and begin studying this secret dossier in peace (you may wish to use your secret camera).

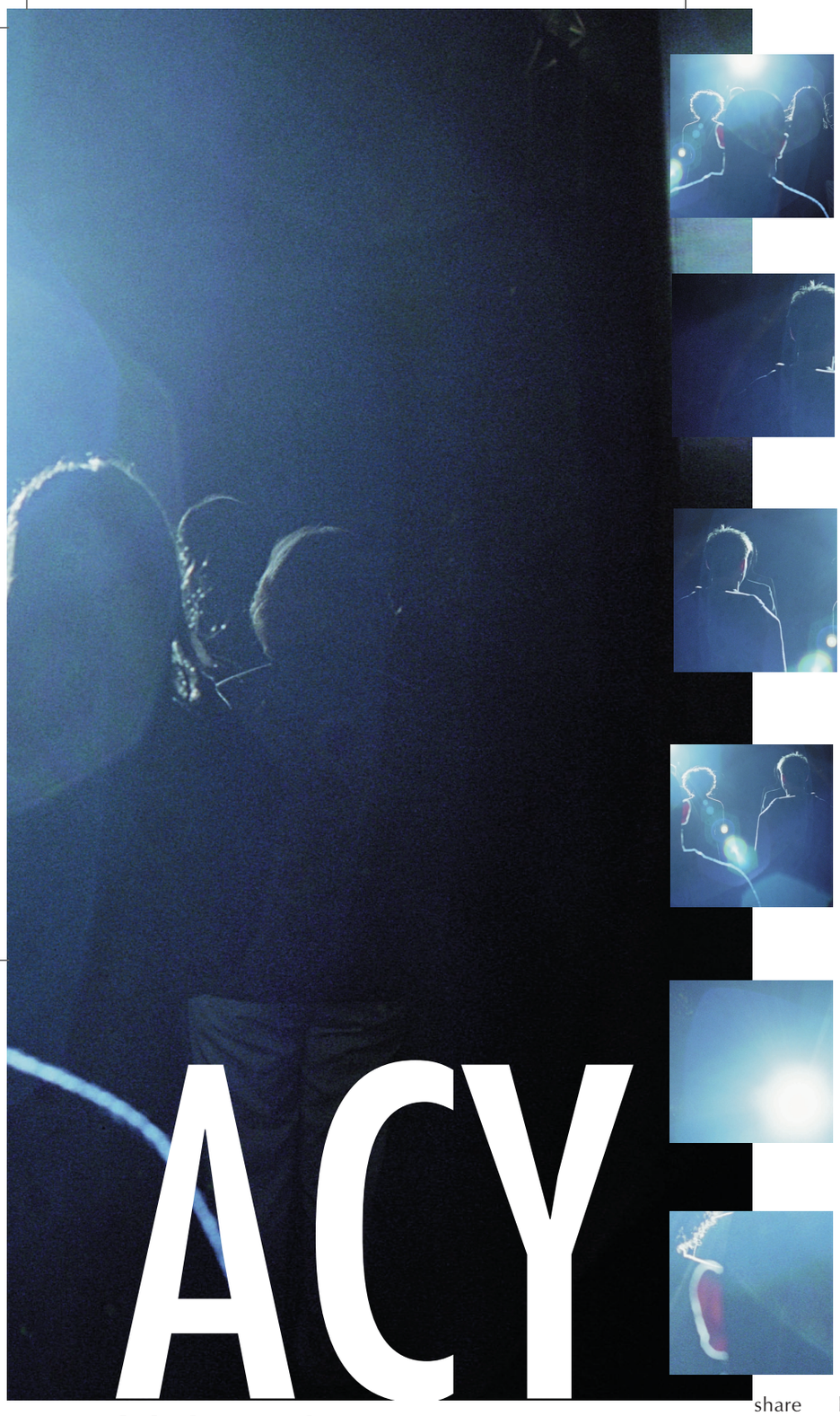
If you are not safe, prize your knowledge, close the magazine and pretend we never met. This magazine will self-destruct in ten seconds...

You are safe with me

Before you laugh and accuse me of paranoia, spare a thought for the American journalist, Joseph D Casolaro.

In 1992, Casolaro was found dead in his bathtub at a West Virginia hotel. Just weeks before, he announced his investigation into a secret society known as Octopus had finished and he was ready to publish his results. Allegedly, the organisation was involved in drug manufacturer, money laundering and biotoxins warfare.

Given the damage his knowledge could have caused, you can decide why he died.



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Industry secrets

The pharmaceutical industry has always been built on secrets.

The world's first drugs were based on private recipes known only to their manufacturers.

Companies marketed their products as having the best confidential formula. Consumers had few ways of judging the safety and effectiveness of these products with unknown ingredients.

There were no clinical trials or controls on advertising, and, it barely seems possible, but even NICE did not exist.

As research became more sophisticated, leading edge companies won market share by finding plant extracts and other compounds that their competitors did not know cured certain diseases.

As scientific methods improved, developments in chemistry were used to create new products using artificial ingredients.

With market share depending on scientific development, pharma companies did their best to keep their scientific endeavours under wraps.

Scientists became the keepers of hidden knowledge; knowledge vital to a drug manufacturer's success.

Secrecy and commercial success became one.

Patently obvious

Secrecy costs lives. During the 1970s, the fanatic religious leader Reverend Jim Jones lured hundreds of socially disadvantaged Americans to Jonestown in the heart of the Guyana jungle with the promise of finding a new social utopia.

Within months of the operation beginning, nearly one thousand disciplines were found dead within the camp's confines, with mass suicide the presumed cause. The lies told by this man led to their demise.

Rumours still circulate today that, far from offering salvation, Reverend Jones enslaved his converts and worked them in his private bauxite and manganese mine, amassing a fortune of $1bn in the process.

Obviously, his secrecy cost lives, although in his final sermon to his sheep he proclaimed: "I'm the best friend you'll ever have."

With growing concerns over safety, drug companies were forced to make their secret recipes public. To protect their commercial interests, manufacturers were granted patents for their original compounds.

However, the loss of secrecy over product constituents meant that copycat producers and generic manufacturers could threaten leading edge firms.

Therefore, other ways of generating comparative advantage had to be found.

The end of disinformation?

Although the loss of their right to secrecy panicked many manufacturers into finding new commercial strategies, the worse was yet to come.

Growing pressure from the safety movement led to the introduction of clinical trials and product licensing for all new drugs.

As a result, companies were forced to give away their biggest secret – whether their products actually worked or not.

With details of product composition, safety and efficacy in the public domain, companies could no longer use disinformation as a commercial strategy. Instead, new approaches to surreptitiously beating competitors were required.

An obvious strategy was to turn the tables on the advocates of openness and to claim that all licensed products were safe, effective and automatically good for target patients.

Mind control by secret governments

Do not believe everything you read. Recently, an innocent story appeared in one of the UK's leading dailies.

The article in question reported that a certain Hick Michaelman, an amateur

bodybuilder from Hertfordshire, had successfully answered every question ever asked on the TV program *Who Want's To Be A Millionaire* since the show began.

Despite harassment from family and friends he refused to apply to the show.

To the naked eye, the Michaelman story is unremarkable. However, do not be fooled. Soon after publication of the story, his behaviour started to become erratic, and he claimed that he heard voices telling him to stop work and to fight against social injustice.

Soon after, whilst on a holiday in Goa, he unexpectedly disappeared.

Despite searches by the police, nothing was heard until an international paranormal investigator contacted his family claiming that Michaelman had been subject to secret mind control from an unknown international government agency.

The manipulation began because the newspaper story was a covert signal to one of its UK based operatives.

Once we believe everything we read, we stop searching for the truth.

Once we assumed that clinical trials conclusively prove the safety and effectiveness of all new drugs, consumers, doctors and manufacturers became happy to go along with this unwritten rule.

Consequently, the granting of a licence gave unethical companies the opportunity to claim that a launched product is automatically a good product, although this may be far from the truth.

The silent war

Warfare used to involve people being killed with clubs, swords, guns, bombs and other dangerous things.

During the Second World War, Silent Weapons Technology (SWT) was developed in America, which aimed to defeat enemies through disinformation and controls over the flow of data and other forms of knowledge.

In recent years, the outcomes of military conflicts such as the Gulf War have increasingly depended upon militarily intelligence and superior information.

In the new battlefield created by the introduction of product licensing, pharma companies developed their own silent weapons.

National advertising campaigns carried messages to the prescriber, whilst PR strategies influenced the consumer.

In the front line, drug reps bombard doctors with scientifically proven findings and a bit of amateur psychologically in the hope of improving sales.

Fighting back

As they began to suffer increasing losses, governments fought back in the information war.

National counter-marketing campaigns

were launch, which balanced well-constructed marketing messages with reviews and opinions from leading clinicians and academics.

As the conflict intensified, pharmaceutical advisers joined GPs in the front-line, in attempt to halt the advance of pharma information.

With stalemates developing in many areas, leading drug companies began to employ special negotiators to liase between the industry and the NHS.

Instead of becoming entrenched, it was hoped that negotiations would avoid unnecessary conflict.

However, as both sides called a truce in primary care, both sides also secretly worked to gain information advantage at a higher level.

NICE information

When it realised that improved audit of pharma information could prevent sales of particular drugs, the UK Government decided to introduce NICE.

By forcing companies to produce data on product efficacy and cost-effectiveness greater controls could be placed over volumes sold.

Panicked by the increasing limits placed on the information they could supply to prescribers, many pharma companies responded by trying to enhance their influence over consumers.

In countries like the Unites States of America, direct to consumer advertising meant that this could be done directly.

In places like the UK, public relations campaigns and health websites were used to get messages out.

This change in strategy suggested that many manufacturers were willing to lose the battle over whose information dominated prescribers in order to win the drug war by beating governments at influencing consumers.

Hidden marketing

With safety, efficacy and cost-effectiveness data all in the public domain, the only information a manufacturer can keep secret until launch is product marketing strategy.

In response, many leading firms have erected walls of silence between their marketing departments and other business units.

Inappropriately, some are also placing increasing pressures on their external PR and advertising agencies to sign exclusivity agreements.

The desire to keep marketing plans hidden is driven by the belief that secrecy leads to commercial success.

Although such a view is intuitive, if you dig deeper, you will discover that it is utter nonsense.

In this world, secrets are for those with something to hide.

If you have an outstanding product, which will knock its competitors out of the market, shout about its potential well before launch.

If you have a dud drug, keep it quiet, particularly amongst the people within your organisation who expect success.

Therefore, the message is clear: secrecy is a sign of weakness, and only the truly strong openly share what they know with the rest of the world.

Secret knowledge

Fans of the X-files will realise, the search for hidden knowledge is prolonged, dangerous and often unrewarding.

However, unless we search, we never uncover the true nature of the things we observe.

As the Mulders and Sculleys amongst you know, too much secrecy can damage the potential of your new drugs.

Therefore, look around, find out which of your colleagues hold your company's hidden knowledge and make sure their secrets become safe with you.

THE AUTHOR

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(Although this could merely be a cover. Beware)